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NEWS

News and Information
for the Communities of the
Bitterroot National Forest
Volume 1
Issue 1



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We welcome your questions,
feedback or ideas! Please
contact Ellen at 375.2609
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with your newsletter input.



THE BIG PICTURE:

Fire has always been a part of the Bitterroot Valley but never have we seen fire like we did during the summer of 2000. The fires impacted 307,000 acres of National Forest lands and an additional 49,000 acres of State and private lands for a total of 356,000 acres. Long before the fires were out, the Forest Service and local communities began efforts to reduce erosion and protect forest resources. Rehabilitation efforts included spreading straw mulch over 117 acres (equivalent to 106 football fields) and mulching and seeding over 400 miles of fireline (distance equivalent from Hamilton, Montana to Salmon, Idaho and back).

Last October, Forest employees hit the ground to begin an overall assessment of the fire's impact to resources. Their findings are documented in a 350-page report that became available to the public in January. In addition to this assessment, a 108-page overview of the Bitterroot Fires of 2000 was also produced. The Overview summarizes the Assessment, looking back at the fires and how they impacted our Forest and local communities. Both documents are available to the public at any of our Forest offices.

As recovery efforts continue over the next several years, I encourage you to participate and provide your views on the management of your natural resources. We began working with Bitterroot Valley communities last fall by hosting a series of meetings to hear what folks felt were the top priorities and needs. In February, we held additional community meetings where we discussed management proposals based on our findings and what we heard from you. These meetings began a 30-day comment period that ended on March 15. During that period we received about 45 letters commenting on the proposals. These comments were used to develop alternatives that will be analyzed in the Burned Area Recovery draft Environmental Impact Statement that is due out this month.

There's a lot of work ahead of us. In addition to rehabilitation and recovery work for the 2000 fires, we have started our spring prescribed burning program to help reduce the amount of fuels on the ground and improve wildlife habitat in areas not impacted by last year's fires. We are also gearing up for the upcoming recreation season by preparing for trail and road maintenance, campground improvements, updating the Forest travel plan map, and other projects related to forest management.

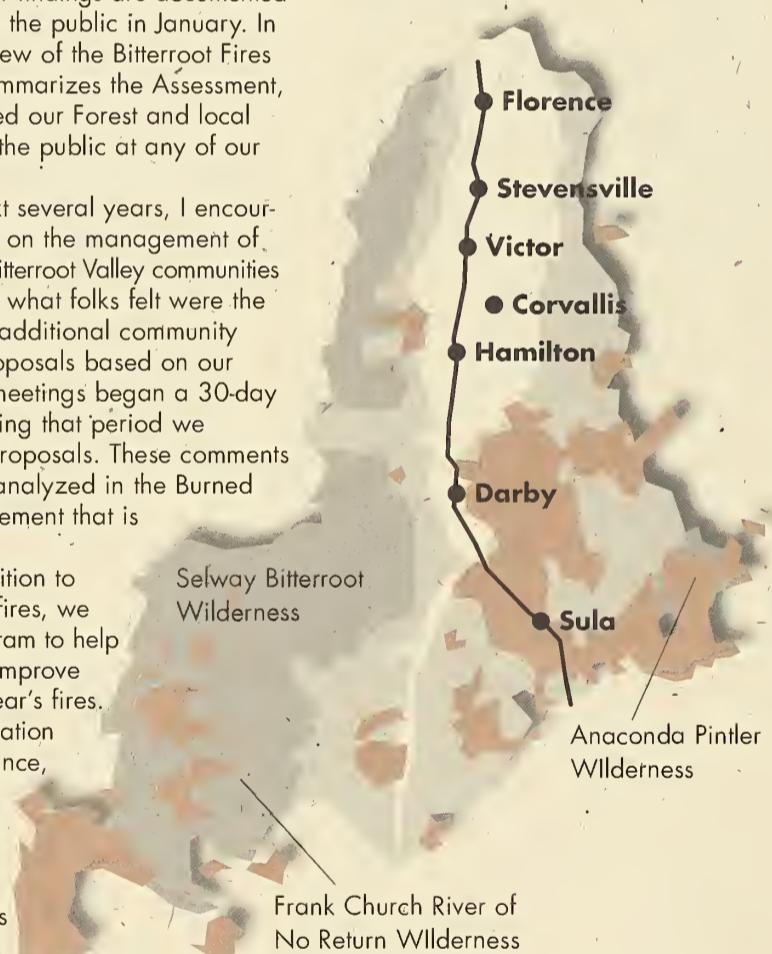
Last year, the citizens of Ravalli County endured the toughest fire season this Valley has seen over many generations. The Bitterroot National Forest appreciates the continued support and cooperation of Valley residents, State and local agencies, and local organizations. We know by continuing this relationship we have set an example in community relations for the rest of the country. We all have learned that we cannot do this alone and that we will get through this together.

Rodd Richardson

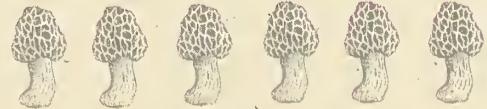
Can you guess the location of our
"cover" photo? Answer on page 4.

Bitterroot National Forest Fires 2000

- Fires 2000
- Forest
- Wilderness
- Private Land



Frank Church River of
No Return Wilderness



A record crop of Morel mushrooms is expected
this spring. For more information see page 2.

FOR YOUR SAFETY

As you venture into the Forest, please be careful. Burn areas can be dangerous because of hazards such as burned out stump holes, loose soil and needles, or unstable standing dead trees and branches. Natural forces change the conditions in the forest constantly. Be alert!



WHAT IS PRESCRIBED BURNING?

Prescribed burning is a useful tool to help reduce fuel loading, or the build up of combustible material. Fire managers go to great lengths to plan prescribed burns. Pre-determined conditions are carefully established and followed in order to successfully reduce the fuel build-up while also minimizing risk to life and property. Successful prescribed burns can reduce the amount of combustible material in a forest that, left untreated for years, can lead to catastrophic fires such as those in 2000. Additionally, fire helps the forest revegetate by adding nutrients to the soil.

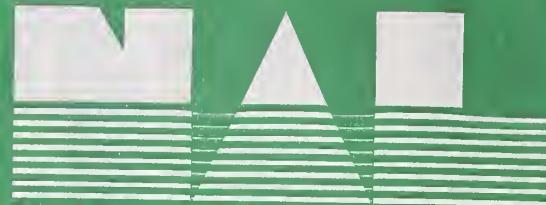
Twenty-one prescribed burns are planned throughout the Bitterroot National Forest this year. The goals for these projects includes:

- Reducing the potential of large, high-intensity wildfires by minimizing the amount of dead trees, branches, brush and ground cover vegetation
- Minimizing the safety risk to firefighters and private landowners
- Improving wildlife habitat by burning out old vegetation, which will replace new nutrients to the soil and enhance growth of new vegetation.

For more information, contact the Forest Supervisor's office at 363-7100.



United States
Department of
Agriculture



National Agricultural Library

The Bitterroot National Forest plans to manage mushroom picking by providing reasonable opportunities for both personal and commercial harvest of mushrooms, while minimizing the social and resource impacts that may occur. The Forest will issue both personal and commercial mushroom harvest permits during the spring and summer of 2001.

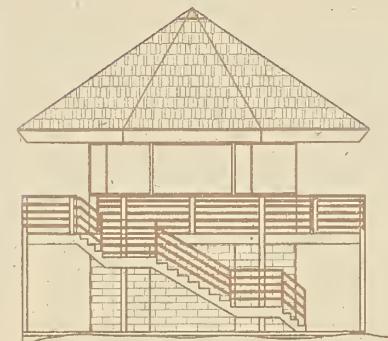
The mushroom harvest management plan strives to provide a mushroom harvesting plan that is thoughtful of both the natural resources and the needs of the public, protects forest resources, and minimizes the social impacts of commercial mushroom harvesting.

available for individuals taking mushrooms amounting to less than five gallons per day. These permits can be used in areas designated for commercial harvest and in wilderness areas. The Personal Use permits are free of charge and can be obtained at any of the Bitterroot National Forest offices.

Commercial Use permits are intended for those harvesting mushrooms to sell, or in amounts greater than five gallons per day. These permits are only valid in areas designated for commercial harvesting. Commercial harvesting is not permitted in wilderness areas. Commercial Use permits

100, depending on the duration of the permit. These permits are only available at the Darby Ranger Station. All harvesters, whether personal or commercial, are required to carry their permits with them at all times while collecting mushrooms.

Know your mushrooms! Mushrooms can be a delicious addition to the plate, but many forest mushroom varieties are poisonous. Make sure that you know what you are collecting and check it with an identification book for reference. Remember if you are not sure—leave it in the forest!



A NEW LOOK(OUT)

The Sula Peak Fire Lookout was built in 1957. It was staffed by a "lookout," trained to detect wildfires early and report them to firefighters, everyday of its operation until it was destroyed by wildfire in August of 2000. The Sula Peak Fire Lookout was the only USFS structure destroyed by the fires.

As the snow melts around Sula Peak this spring, visitors will witness the forest as it begins the process of recovery. Along with the green-up, construction on the new Sula Peak Lookout will begin in May. Building a fire lookout is not a typical construction project. The new lookout will be an octagonal shape to maximize the lookout's ability to spot fires, use materials that blend in with the natural landscape, and be designed to withstand the high winds that pummel the site.

The Forest Service is looking for ways to incorporate some of the fire-killed timber into the design. We are hopeful that the construction will be completed, and that the lookout will be staffed again, by early August 2001.

GET INVOLVED NOW!

The Forest publishes a quarterly list of upcoming projects. This list is mailed to those who request it. If you do not already receive the "Quarterly Schedule of Proposed Actions" and would like to, please call 363-7100 and ask to be put on that mailing list. This is an excellent way to stay informed of what projects are being proposed, when you have opportunities for comment, and what projects are currently happening.

DID YOU KNOW THAT...

During the fire season of 2000, over 500 people locally were hired to help with the suppression and rehabilitation efforts.

BURNED AREA RECOVERY DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT

The Bitterroot Valley experienced a fire season of historic proportions last summer. Wildfires burned 307,000 acres on the Forest. A team of resource specialists from the Bitterroot National Forest is currently preparing an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) which will document the benefits and impacts of management proposals to reduce fuels, improve watershed conditions and reforest burned lands.

Feb 2001	May 2001	Sept 2001	Oct 2001
Release proposal for review and study comments (30 days)	Release draft EIS for public review and comment (45 days)	Continue study and edit draft EIS	Release final EIS

For additional information about this project, contact Gary Dahlgren, Acting Deputy Forest Supervisor, at 363-7100 or Craig Bobzien, Darby/Sula District Ranger, at 821-3913/821-3201. If you would like to be on the mailing list, please call Tami Brewer at 363-7144.

THE TROUBLE WITH WEEDS IS...

Noxious weeds are non-native plant species that can affect biodiversity, productivity, land value, wildlife, fisheries, soil and watersheds. Noxious weeds are successful at quickly spreading to disturbed land—such as the site of a wildfire. It will be important to monitor and aggressively treat new weed infestations, such as spotted knapweed, resulting from the fires.

The Forest will be addressing noxious weeds through the noxious weed Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) later this year. The proposal will concentrate on weed treatments in burned areas, with further consideration to treatments throughout the Forest.

Additionally, the Forest will continue its normal program of work to treat weeds on roadsides, trails, trailheads, and administrative sites.

WATER, WATER EVERYWHERE...

The Bitterroot National Forest is helping to develop a proposal for Large-Scale Watershed Restoration Project funding. Nationwide the Forest Service currently funds 14 large-scale watershed restoration projects. Because of the national attention that the fires of 2000 brought to the Bitterroot Valley, and because of the inherent value of water for community, agriculture, recreation, and economic uses—the Bitterroot Watershed has been recognized for its potential as the next Large-Scale Watershed Restoration Project.

The Forest is working with a large network of local and statewide partners to develop a successful proposal that would address the long-term sustainability of our community and its natural resources. The Bitter Root Water Forum is leading this effort because of their proven abilities and experience throughout the valley with water related issues.

If successful, the proposal would result in additional funding to support watershed restoration activities, building a partnership between the communities, businesses and agencies throughout the watershed. Funding could last for five years, with the result being a sustainable funding source for continued operation of this partnership. The watershed project aims to integrate specific restoration projects and community outreach to achieve a greater level of success than individual efforts could achieve.

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DID YOU KNOW THAT...

There are over 1500 miles of trails in the Bitterroot National Forest.

That is roughly equivalent to the distance between Hamilton, Montana and Chicago, Illinois!



Migration Mania is an event to celebrate the return of migratory birds to the Bitterroot Valley. The event will take place on May 18-19 through a variety of activities in Stevensville. On May 18 there will be special slide presentations at the Stevensville Senior Center from 6:30-8:30 PM. The evening will include a slide presentation by a University of Montana graduate about warblers, a retired wildlife professor about different parasites of birds, and Sue McDonald, from the Lee Metcalf National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) on the basics of migration and common birds visiting the Bitterroot Valley. On May 19, from 10:00 AM - 4:00 PM, there will be a variety of events at the Lee Metcalf NWR. Come and enjoy booths with displays and exhibits, activities for kids, field trips, bird walks, photography walks, insect walks, and music. Be sure to stop by the Forest Service booth where Dave Lockman, wildlife biologist, will display information about fire effects on local bird species.

For more information call Robyn Meyers, Migration Mania Program Coordinator at 777-5552 ext. 305.

FUEL REDUCTION PROJECTS

In order to reduce the risk and intensity of future fires in certain areas, the Bitterroot National Forest is proposing to reduce the buildup of the standing dead trees that were created by the fires of 2000.

Small "sample projects" are being created to show what the larger fuels reduction proposals on the forest would look like.

The Waugh Gulch project was chosen because it is within the wildland/urban interface area and because of its proximity to green, or unburned, fuels. When homes are surrounded by combustible material such as timber, grasses, and fallen needles

and leaves, they are at a greater risk from wildfire. Fuels were reduced in this area using a combination of thinning, skidding and decking.

The Forest is planning similar future projects on larger scales in other burned sites to reduce fuel loading, and thus the potential for catastrophic fires in the wildland/urban interface.

Waugh Gulch is four miles south of Sulia in the Waugh Gulch drainage. This project can be accessed from the Waugh Gulch Road #13334 and is about three acres.

Before Treatment (Right)

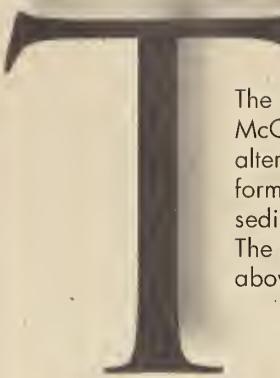


After Treatment (Below)



MCCLAIN LANDSLIDE PROJECT

Copies of the McClain Landslide Environmental Assessment are available at the Stevensville Ranger Station. Comments on the EA were due early in May. For additional information, please contact Elizabeth Ballard at 777-5461.



The Stevensville Ranger District prepared an Environmental Assessment (EA) for the McClain Landslide Project. The EA examines two alternatives in detail—the no action alternative and the proposed action. The proposed action addressed in the EA was formulated in response to a legal Settlement Agreement, and is designed to abate sedimentation originating from the landslide and flowing into McClain Creek. The proposed action is to install, maintain and monitor drainage systems on, and above, the landslide, and to revegetate and monitor the landslide.

MONEY WHERE IT MATTERS

Ravalli County recently received a \$1,000,000 grant from the Montana Department of Labor U.S., Department of Labor U.S., and the Montana AFL-CIO, which provides special funding to hire temporary employees for jobs that benefit public resources and infrastructure impacted by the fires.

The program is intended to benefit local or regional residents who were financially impacted by the fires and is best suited for labor-intensive work projects. The funding can be used to pay salaries (up to 1040 hours of work per employee) for work on public lands, or for work on

private lands that will benefit public lands and resources.

For more information, contact the Job Service Center: 363.1822



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Hamilton, MT 59840

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A NEW WEBSITE

<http://www.fs.fed.us/r1/pgr/afterfire/index.html>

The Intermountain and Northern Regions of the Forest Service have a new website full of information about the fires of 2000 and the path towards recovery. You can log on to find out about the post-fire assessment, steps towards restoration and recovery, the National Fire Plan, and related links.

Check out these other hot websites too:

Bitterroot National Forest www.fs.fed.us/r1/bitterroot
Lolo National Forest www.fs.fed.us/r1/lolo
Living with Fire www.fs.fed.us/rm/fire_game
Firewise www.firewise.org



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West of Lost Trail Pass.

Photography:

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